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Letter dated 10 November 2003 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

As you will recall, I dispatched a multidisciplinary assessment mission to the Central African subregion from 8 to 22 June 2003, pursuant to a request of the Security Council, contained in its presidential statement of 31 October 2002 (S/PRST/2002/31), to explore ways to implement a comprehensive, integrated and resolute approach to the issues of peace, security and development in Central Africa. The mission visited all 11 States members of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and submitted its report to me on 10 September 2003.

I am pleased to bring to the attention of the Security Council the findings of the mission. I am in general agreement with the assessment made by the mission. I also believe that there is a need for greater coordination and coherence in the activities of the different components of the United Nations system. While the assessment of the peace and security aspects adequately covers all the key issues, there is a need to undertake further examination of the root causes of the conflicts that have plagued some of the countries in the subregion. I have, therefore, requested that a thorough review of the programmes of the United Nations be carried out, with a view to enhancing their coherence and effectiveness. I intend to keep the Council informed of developments in this respect.

The United Nations will continue to be involved in the search for long-term peace and stability in the subregion, providing the necessary support to the States members of ECCAS. During meetings with the mission, most of the Governments in the subregion expressed their desire for an enhanced United Nations presence, including through the establishment of a United Nations office. I am however concerned about the proliferation of offices, bearing in mind that there are already a number of United Nations structures in the subregion, including three offices headed by Special Representatives of the Secretary-General.

There are also numerous initiatives that encompass a large number of the 11 ECCAS member States, some of which are also part of other subregional groupings. As the Council is aware, many of the countries concerned will be involved in the International Conference for the Great Lakes region, which is expected to result in a regional framework to enhance stability, security, cooperation and development. Under these circumstances, and without first carrying out the review mentioned above, it would not be possible to make an objective assessment of the need for establishing a new office in Central Africa.

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I am proposing, however, to appoint a Special Envoy who would be available — as required — to work on political issues with Governments in the subregion, and who would also interface with the United Nations entities involved in development and humanitarian activities in Central Africa. One of the key priorities will be to identify concrete measures to support the capacity of ECCAS and other mechanisms that the countries in the subregion have established. I shall ensure that the Special Envoy works in full consultation and collaboration with my Special Representatives in the subregion so as to avoid duplication of effort.

With the concurrence of the Council, I intend to proceed with the approach that I have outlined as early as possible. I should be grateful if you would bring the present letter and its attachment to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Kofi A. **Annan**

Interim report of the multidisciplinary assessment mission to the Central African subregion

Summary

A United Nations multidisciplinary assessment mission visited Central Africa from 8 to 22 June 2003 to undertake a review of the priority needs and challenges confronting the subregion, focusing especially on issues of peace, security, economic development, humanitarian affairs, human rights and HIV/AIDS, and to define the appropriate subregional strategies to address those challenges. The assessment was conducted in partnership with the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the principal subregional institution responsible for peace and security in Central Africa. The Secretary-General authorized the mission pursuant to the request of the Security Council in its presidential statement of 31 October 2002 (S/PRST/2002/31), to explore ways in which the United Nations could support Central African States in developing a comprehensive and integrated subregional approach to the issues of peace, security and development in Central Africa.

The mission, headed by the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Tuliameni Kalomoh, visited all of the 11 States members of ECCAS. It sought to define the strategies that could be employed to strengthen the effectiveness of subregional institutions in the area of peace and security. The mission held extensive consultations with Governments, political and civil society leaders, business leaders and representatives of trade unions, subregional institutions, members of the diplomatic community, and United Nations agencies and programmes.

The mission concluded the visit to the subregion with a strong sense of a striking paradox, namely, that Central Africa is potentially one of the richest subregions in Africa but also contains the largest number of States that fall among the lowest in almost all human development indices. Central Africa is also mired in armed conflicts, many of them recurrent and persistent over many years, countless crises of governance, proliferation of small arms, the fragility of the security sectors, cross-border movement of weapons, drugs and armed groups, mass movements of refugees, underdevelopment of infrastructure, widespread poverty and weak State institutions, all of which have had a debilitating effect on the subregion's overall socio-economic and political performance.

The mission concluded that, as a result of the cross-cutting and other challenges that transcend national boundaries, an integrated and holistic subregional approach is required to complement national solutions and lay a durable foundation for the solutions.

Despite the many problems that are highlighted in the present report, the mission also concluded that the prospects for positive change remain high, especially if the international community maintains and intensifies its partnership with subregional organizations, Governments and civil society groups to address the problems confronting Central Africa.

All the countries visited, except one, specifically called for the setting-up of a political presence of the United Nations in the subregion, through the establishment of an office in Central Africa. Such an office would, they argued, facilitate the implementation of a comprehensive and integrated approach to the issues of peace, security and development in the subregion.

I. Introduction

1. At the open meeting of the Security Council held on 22 October 2002 on strengthening cooperation between the United Nations system and the Central African region in the maintenance of peace and security, which was attended by several Foreign Ministers from the subregion, Council members called for international support for regional initiatives to consolidate recent progress towards peace in the area. On 31 October 2002, in continuation of its discussion on the item, the Council issued a presidential statement (S/PRST/2002/31) in which it affirmed the need to promote and strengthen cooperation between the United Nations and the Central African States in the field of peace and security. The Council called on the Central African States, with the support of the United Nations, to improve the effectiveness, coordination and cohesion of organizations in the subregion. The Council also emphasized the importance of a comprehensive, integrated, resolute and concerted approach to the issues of peace, security and development in Central Africa and, in that connection, invited the Secretary-General to report to the Council within six months on ways to implement such an approach for Central Africa, including through the dispatch to the region of an inter-agency evaluation mission.

2. On 17 April 2003, the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Tuliameni Kalomoh, on behalf of the Secretary-General, briefed Council members on the various efforts undertaken by the United Nations to promote durable peace in Central Africa. He informed the Council of the Secretary-General's intention to dispatch a multidisciplinary assessment mission to Central Africa to explore ways and means to implement a comprehensive and integrated approach to the issues of peace, security and development in the subregion.

3. In a statement to the press following that meeting, Security Council members re-emphasized the importance of a comprehensive, integrated, resolute and concerted approach to the issues of peace, security and development in Central Africa and welcomed the Secretary-General's intention to dispatch a multidisciplinary assessment mission to the subregion. They furthermore invited him to submit to the Security Council at the end of that mission a report with recommendations on measures to be taken for the implementation of such a global approach. The present report is submitted pursuant to the Council's request.

II. Establishment and activities of the mission

4. The multidisciplinary assessment mission visited the Central African subregion from 8 to 22 June 2003. Headed by the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs the mission comprised representatives of the following departments, offices, agencies and programmes of the United Nations system: Department of Political Affairs, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Department for Disarmament Affairs, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). As the role of the United Nations in this endeavour is essentially to support the efforts of regional States and institutions, the mission was carried out in close partnership with the main subregional institution responsible for issues of peace, security and subregional

integration in Central Africa, namely the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). The Deputy Secretary-General of ECCAS and a senior military officer therefore also participated in the mission.

5. The mission's terms of reference were the following:

(a) To identify priority needs and challenges in Central Africa in the areas of peace, security, economic and social development, humanitarian affairs and human rights, including the inter-linkages between those needs and challenges;

(b) To consult with Governments and subregional institutions in Central Africa on ways and means of enhancing cooperation with the United Nations in addressing those needs and challenges;

(c) To identify subregional measures to be implemented by the Economic Community of Central African States[1] and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC),[2] with the cooperation of the United Nations, to help to address the needs and challenges identified;

(d) To make recommendations on how best the international community can support specific programmes designed to strengthen the effectiveness of subregional efforts and institutions in the area of peace and security.

6. The mission visited all 11 States members of ECCAS, namely, Gabon, headquarters of ECCAS (8, 10 and 22 June), Sao Tome and Principe (9 June), the Republic of the Congo, current chair of ECCAS and CEMAC (10 and 11 June), Angola (12 and 13 June), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (13-15 June), Burundi (15 and 16 June), Rwanda (16 and 17 June), Cameroon (17 and 18 June), Equatorial Guinea (19 June), Chad (19 and 20 June) and the Central African Republic, CEMAC headquarters (21 and 22 June).

7. The mission met with heads of State or Government, other senior government officials, leaders of main political parties, representatives of civil society and non-governmental organizations, business and religious leaders and members of the diplomatic community. The mission also held working sessions with the United Nations country teams in all the countries visited. In Libreville, Kinshasa, Bujumbura and Bangui, the mission was briefed, respectively, by the military components of CEMAC, the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), the African Union, the United Nations Peace-building Support Office in the Central African Republic as well as CEMAC officers in Bangui. In addition, the mission held discussions with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, and with the Secretary-General and other senior secretariat officials of ECCAS.

8. The various interlocutors welcomed the mission as an important reaffirmation of the United Nations commitment to remain engaged in the subregion and to assist them in dealing with the numerous problems confronting Central Africa. Among the issues discussed were the economic and political relations among and within ECCAS member States, peace and security concerns, peace-building and peacekeeping efforts in the subregion, conflict situations in the Central African

[1] The following 11 countries are members of ECCAS: Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe.

[2] The following six countries are members of CEMAC: Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon.

Republic and the Great Lakes region, in particular the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi, disarmament, reintegration and repatriation of former combatants, cross-border incursions, illegal arms trafficking, illegal exploitation of national resources, proliferation of arms and cross-border movements of bandits and militias, landmines, the need to promote national reconciliation and political dialogue, governance, human rights and humanitarian issues, the weaknesses of subregional institutions and the need to strengthen their capacities and to enhance cooperation with the United Nations, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, poverty reduction and other economic and development issues, the need for capacity-building and regional integration, and issues affecting children, including child trafficking, prostitution, teenage pregnancies, the problems of street children and child soldiers.

9. Most interlocutors called on the United Nations to be more proactive in the prevention and management of conflicts in the subregion. Pointing to the weaknesses of their subregional institutions, regional leaders specifically requested the assistance of the United Nations in strengthening the operational capacities of those organizations. Many also underlined the need for enhanced cooperation between the United Nations and subregional organizations, especially in the implementation of a comprehensive and integrated subregional approach to dealing with the issues of peace, security and development in Central Africa. To that end, all the countries visited, except one, called for the setting-up of a political presence of the United Nations in the subregion, through the establishment of an office in Central Africa. Such an office would, they argued, facilitate the implementation of the proposed approach.

III. Background

10. The Central African subregion, which comprises the 11 ECCAS member States, has a combined population of approximately 115 million and covers a land area estimated at about 6.6 million square kilometres. A particularly striking paradox in Central Africa is the fact that it is potentially one of the richest subregions in Africa, greatly endowed with a wide variety of natural resources (for instance eight ECCAS countries[3] are either current or future oil producers) but, at the same time, it is the subregion containing the largest number of countries that rank lowest in almost all of the human development indices. The subregion is also characterized by the recurrence of armed rebellions and conflicts that have hampered its development efforts over decades. In 7 of the 11 countries visited, over 50 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line. Seven of the countries — Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda — are either in conflict or in post-conflict situations. Only Cameroon, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Sao Tome and Principe have been unaffected by direct conflict and appear to be enjoying relative stability.

11. Many critical cross-cutting challenges, including ethnic tensions, refugee movements, armed rebellions, cross-border incursions, non-inclusive governance, fragile national dialogue and reconciliation processes, nationality concerns, widespread poverty and deprivation are common to the subregion and would need to be addressed if sustainable peace and progress are to advance in the countries concerned. As a result of those critical problems, subregional integration, vital for

[3] Angola, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Sao Tome and Principe.

long-term stability and development, has been slow in coming. The fact that some ECCAS member States belong to other subregional organizations, such as CEMAC, the Southern African Development Community and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, has also not facilitated regional integration in Central Africa.

12. Sustained efforts have been made at various levels to help Central Africa to stabilize the situation and lay the foundations for durable peace and stability. To that end, the six States members of CEMAC, the members of the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States,[4] and the African Union and the United Nations have been particularly active. In addition, Central African States have benefited through bilateral efforts with countries and institutions outside the region to enhance their capacities to manage crisis situations and participate in peacekeeping operations.

13. United Nations support has included the development and enhancement of capabilities for early warning and conflict prevention, and the deployment of peace-building offices and peacekeeping operations. Currently, United Nations peace-building offices are deployed in two countries in Central Africa, Burundi and the Central African Republic, while a peacekeeping operation (MONUC) is deployed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In addition, the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, based in Nairobi, and the dispatch of several special envoys to the subregion further contribute to United Nations peace endeavours in Central Africa.

14. United Nations contributions have also included the establishment, in May 1992, of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, with the objective of promoting arms limitation, disarmament and confidence-building measures among members of ECCAS. Since its establishment, the Committee has provided the main forum under which ECCAS member States meet on a regular basis to discuss and exchange information on peace and security challenges in the subregion.

15. Despite these various efforts, Central Africa continues to encounter enormous pressures in the political, economic, social and security areas, which have perpetuated politico-military crises in the countries directly affected and beyond, especially as many of the crises and their consequences frequently affect or otherwise threaten to spill over into neighbouring countries.

IV. Priority needs and challenges

A. Peace and security

16. The continuing fragility of democratic political processes in the subregion was demonstrated most recently by the coup d'état in the Central African Republic in March 2003 and the attempted coup in Sao Tome and Principe in July 2003. In his report of 13 April 1998 on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa (A/52/871-S/1998/318), the Secretary-General observed that the causes of conflict in Africa vary, reflecting the diversity and complexity of the continent. They include historical legacies, internal and external factors and economic motives. The root causes of the current situation in the Central African subregion can, in particular, be traced to at least two main

[4] Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Gambia, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, Togo and Tunisia.

internal sources, namely, the crisis of governance and the widespread poverty, which have, in several cases, been compounded by external factors. Thus, despite the enormous natural wealth of the subregion, mismanagement and unconstitutional, non-inclusive rule have not only retarded its development but also polarized its societies, leading in extreme cases to recurrent armed rebellions and prolonged wars. The dire consequences of the conflicts have seriously undermined Central Africa's efforts to ensure sustainable peace and development.

17. In most of the countries visited by the multidisciplinary assessment mission, particular concern was expressed about the impact of extreme and widespread poverty and especially high levels of unemployment among young people, who could easily be pushed into banditry or armed mercenary activities. Women's groups, in particular in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, voiced strong criticism of what they said was a common practice of unequal treatment and the exclusion of women from political decision-making processes and the management of public affairs. As women have been the most affected by conflicts in the subregion, they called for more balanced representation and participation in conflict prevention and peace processes as well as in political decision-making.

18. Insecurity in many post-conflict countries in the subregion is often fuelled by armed rebellions, banditry, the proliferation of small arms, and the inability of the security forces to maintain law and order. Frequently, security forces in many countries of the subregion are selected on an ethnic basis and are therefore unable to engender broad confidence or provide effective security to all sectors of society.

19. The proliferation of small arms is both a cause and consequence of the subregion's recurrent conflicts. According to UNDP, in the Great Lakes region alone there are more than 1 million illegal small arms in circulation. In the Congo, there were approximately 40,000 illegal weapons in circulation in 2001.

20. Unless addressed successfully, the issue of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants, especially in post-conflict situations, could jeopardize the consolidation of peace and stability in the countries concerned. Large numbers of former fighters, if they do not receive proper assistance to resume constructive civilian life, could be forced to resume destabilizing activities, either as mercenaries or as members of militia groups, thus increasing the threat of trans-border violence and urban criminality.

21. Several disarmament programmes have been designed by Central African countries but not yet implemented, owing to the lack of resources. These include the programme of priority activities relating to the illegal trade in small arms adopted by the ECCAS Foreign Ministers at the nineteenth ministerial meeting of the Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, held at Brazzaville in May 2003. Progress has, however, been made under the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Programme in the Great Lakes region, a four-year initiative (2002-2006) coordinated by the World Bank and regrouping 30 donor countries and United Nations partners and designed to promote the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration of about 350,000 ex-combatants in nine countries. ECCAS is involved in the implementation of that programme, which covers six of its members, namely Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

22. The mission noted that, given the proximity and porosity of the borders linking the countries in Central Africa, as well as the long-standing and complex interrelationships among the countries and peoples of the area, unsettled crises and

conflicts in any State of the subregion frequently impact on or spill over into its neighbours. Government officials in Cameroon and Gabon in particular expressed concern at what they characterized as a "risk of contamination". The regional impact of the conflict situations in the Central African Republic and the Great Lakes region were repeatedly mentioned as telling examples.

23. Furthermore, the cross-border circulation of weapons and the movement of armed groups, bandits and refugees in Central Africa vividly illustrate this linkage, the repercussions of which have affected the prospects for peace, security and development throughout the subregion. This was the conclusion drawn by Amara Essy, whom the Secretary-General had dispatched as his Special Envoy to the Central African Republic and the Congo in December 2000 to assess the impact of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on those two neighbouring States. The Special Envoy found that the subregional humanitarian, economic and security consequences of that conflict were devastating, and were likely to linger so long as the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo persisted.

24. Subsequently, in his report of 21 September 2001 on the situation in the Central African Republic (S/2001/886), the Secretary-General indicated that the problem of security in that country needed to be addressed in a broader context of the pursuit of the restoration of peace and stability to the subregion as a whole.

25. The impact of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the nine countries bordering it was also highlighted during the visit of the mission. Many interlocutors strongly believed that the restoration of lasting stability to that country was a condition sine qua non for sustainable stability for its neighbours and for the subregion as a whole. In this regard, government officials in Cameroon, Chad, the Congo and Gabon deplored the fact that they were not included in the consultations concerning the peace process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, even though they suffered from the direct impact of the conflict in that country. Consequently, they requested that their countries be included as full participants in the proposed international conference on the Great Lakes region. A number of subregional leaders also stressed the urgent need for the Security Council to provide MONUC with a robust enforcement mandate to enable it to assist effectively in restoring peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

26. Despite the many challenges that remain, the mission noted that prospects for the subregion, albeit still fragile, had shown signs of great improvement. In Angola, for example, peace has been steadily taking root since the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding at Luena, Angola on 4 April 2002 by the Government of Angola and UNITA. The transformation of UNITA from an armed movement into a political party has contributed positively to the peace process. In Burundi, despite the fact that the overall security and political situation remains volatile, there are positive developments in the implementation of the transitional arrangements provided for under the Arusha Agreement. While the deployment of the African Mission in Burundi is not yet complete, essentially for lack of funding, the setting-up of assembly points for the cantonment of the armed opposition's combatants is ongoing. The issues of security, land, property claims and restitution are some of the unresolved challenges that continue to face the country. In Sao Tome and Principe, regional peace efforts have successfully returned the constitutional order to power following the attempted coup d'état of 17 July 2003.

27. In the Central African Republic, there was widespread lawlessness, looting and destruction of property in the immediate aftermath of the overthrow of the government of the former President, Ange Félix Patassé, in March 2003. The

situation has improved markedly since the deployment of 300 French troops, however, as well as 500 Chadian soldiers to support the CEMAC force, which includes troops from Gabon and the Congo. Furthermore, the efforts of the regime to promote dialogue and reconciliation appear to have greatly reduced political tension. The Central African Republic is currently actively engaged in transitional arrangements aimed at restoring democratic and constitutional government by 2005.

28. Security in Chad continues to improve despite recurrent tensions in parts of the country and the continuing circulation of arms within the civilian population. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the installation of the transitional government and agreement on the integration of combatants from the armed opposition into the national armed forces has improved prospects for sustainable peace. Security remains an issue of the utmost concern, however, especially in the Ituri district and other areas in the eastern part of the country.

29. Efforts are continuing to consolidate the important gains made as a result of agreements reached by the Government of the Congo and armed militia groups to enhance prospects for broad-based national reconciliation and peace. Relief agencies operating in the country continue to express concern, however, at the acute humanitarian challenges in the Pool region, where the destruction of infrastructure, poor sanitary conditions, inadequate health services and malnutrition, especially of children, could discourage the full return of internally displaced persons and refugees to their homes. It is also considered that greater political overture, especially to opposition members still in exile, could strengthen the process of national reconciliation and help reduce recurrent rebel activities.

30. In Rwanda, the Government continues to work on reconciliation efforts, putting in place confidence-building measures such as the recent release from custody of 40,000 persons facing various allegations connected to the genocide of 1994, the initiation of the *Gacaca* justice process (a traditional justice system similar to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission), the conducting of a referendum on a new constitution in May 2003, and the organization of multiparty presidential elections in August 2003.

B. Challenges of poverty

31. The protracted crises in the region have had a considerable negative effect on the living conditions of the people of Central Africa and have increased poverty in the subregion. Governments of countries in conflict or post-conflict situations have had to divert meagre resources to meet increased security requirements. As a result, investments in vital social sectors such as education, health and housing have suffered, and infrastructure has deteriorated.

32. Today, poverty is pervasive in the subregion and more than half of the population lives below the poverty line. Although many countries have prepared commendable poverty reduction strategy papers, it would be unrealistic to expect poverty challenges to be addressed effectively without peace and stability.

33. It is worth noting that several political leaders and other stakeholders who met with the mission stressed that, without trust and confidence among the leaders in the subregion, economic integration, necessary for sustainable growth, which in turn was vital for poverty reduction, could not be achieved.

34. Private sector representatives were of the view that the fight against corruption and impunity should be addressed more effectively and that new regulatory

frameworks more conducive to private investment should be promoted. In so doing, governments in the subregion would not only help to combat poverty but also prevent future conflicts since improved economic opportunities could generate greater employment, especially for young people who might otherwise drift towards destructive activities such as banditry or participation in armed militia groups.

35. Africa's heavy debt burden was evoked as one of the key factors hindering investment in social sectors. For many countries in the region, the proportion of debt to gross national income was said to have reached an unbearable point: 137.9 per cent in Angola, 221.4 per cent in the Congo, 309.5 per cent in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and 548.1 per cent in Sao Tome and Principe.

C. Humanitarian issues

36. The mission was informed that the number of displaced persons in the subregion (internally displaced, asylum seekers and refugees) had reached approximately 3 million.[5] It was also stressed that, while many of the States in the subregion have generously hosted refugees from neighbouring countries, large population movements can be politically, socially and environmentally destabilizing. The high costs of such cross-border movements, including the rapid spread of the HIV/AIDS virus and other infectious diseases, represent additional pressures for those developing countries already overburdened by many other challenges.

37. In Angola, the armed conflict that was the major cause of forced internal and external displacements of people is over, but daunting humanitarian challenges remain. The steady return of relative security in the country has increased the potential for the return of internally displaced persons and refugees to their homes. Indeed, the Memorandum of Understanding of 4 April 2002, between the Government of Angola and UNITA has paved the way for peace and national reconciliation. In July 2003, the Government of Angola, UNHCR and asylum countries launched a programme for the voluntary repatriation of 450,000 Angolan refugees from southern Africa. At the same time, the Government of Angola has undertaken to reintegrate approximately 400,000 former UNITA combatants and their dependants. The repatriation and reintegration programme is impeded by logistical and safety constraints, such as damaged infrastructure, limited availability of public services, and the presence of landmines and unexploded ordnance.

38. In Burundi, insecurity constitutes the main impediment to the implementation of humanitarian relief operations, especially in the southern and eastern regions of the country. The United Nations and the African Union are cooperating to support the return of Burundian refugees in safety and dignity.

39. Widespread lawlessness and the looting of property, including property belonging to humanitarian relief agencies, followed the coup that overthrew the

[5] The precise figure is 2,997,434 (Angola: 202,000 internally displaced persons and 12,830 refugees/persons of concern; Burundi: 100,000 internally displaced persons and 54,210 refugees/persons of concern; Cameroon: 52,597 refugees/persons of concern; Central African Republic: 50,204 refugees/persons of concern; Chad: 17,000 refugees/persons of concern; Congo: 111,670 refugees/persons of concern; Democratic Republic of the Congo: an estimate of 2 million internally displaced persons and 331,241 refugees/persons of concern; Gabon: 18,952 refugees/persons of concern; Rwanda: 46,730 refugees/persons of concern; figures for Sao Tome and Principe and Equatorial Guinea were not available). The figure is derived from UNHCR reports.

democratic government in the Central African Republic in March 2003. That event affected the provision of protection not only to refugees but also to foreign nationals, particularly Chadian nationals living in the Central African Republic. That provoked a large influx of displaced persons into Chad, including both Central African refugees and Chadian nationals who had fled instability in the Central African Republic. Meanwhile, the stabilization of the political situation in Chad offers the potential for the return of approximately 30,000 Chadian refugees who have been living in northern Cameroon for more than a decade. UNHCR is currently engaged in assisting Central African refugees located in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Congo to return home voluntarily.

40. As a result of the encouraging political dispensation evolving in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, humanitarian conditions are said to have begun to improve. However, owing to the persistent insecurity in the eastern part of the country, particularly in the Ituri district, relief agencies continue to experience limited access to internally displaced persons and displaced refugee populations.

41. The consolidation of peace in the Congo could pave the way for the voluntary repatriation of refugees, especially from neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo and Gabon. UNHCR is also assisting in efforts to repatriate refugees from other subregional States, including Angola and Rwanda, who have been living for many years in the Congo.

42. As a result of the improving conditions for return in Rwanda, UNHCR has, since October 2002, been actively promoting voluntary repatriation to Rwanda. UNHCR plans to repatriate approximately 60,000 Rwandan refugees during the course of 2003-2004. Indeed, approximately 23,000 Rwandan refugees were repatriated from the United Republic of Tanzania during the last quarter of 2002 and, in the first half of 2003, more than 6,000 Rwandan refugees have been assisted to return home.

D. Human rights issues

43. The prevalence of civil wars, rebellions and banditry in the subregion has heightened threats to individual and community rights, especially as the conflicts have eroded the capacity of governments to provide effective security, guarantee respect for human rights and safeguard the rule of law.

44. Furthermore, the subregion is characterized by rapidly increasing urbanization without development or adequate social services. The population is therefore exposed to grave pandemics with no access or only very limited access to adequate health care, limited access to educational systems and inadequate development of local governing structures. Not only is the development process hampered, but the fundamental principles of a rights-based approach to development are not applied, including the right to participation by all and the inclusion of vulnerable groups.

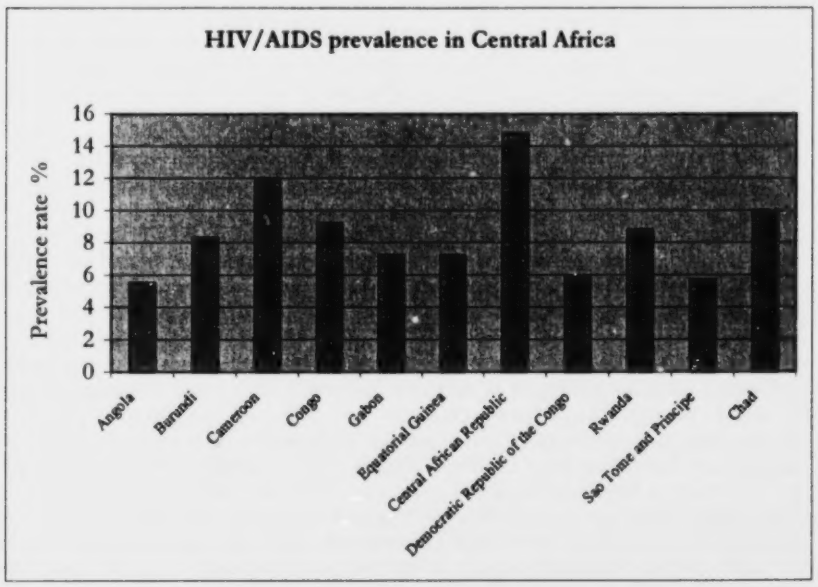
45. Despite, or perhaps as a result of, having abundant natural resources, the subregion is plagued by problems related to conflicts over natural resources. This situation fuels xenophobia, discrimination against migrant workers and human rights violations relating to the exploitation of natural resources. The exploitation of the subregion's natural resources has not significantly advanced human development and social solidarity in the countries concerned. Major transnational companies operating in those countries have not always demonstrated sufficient social and

environmental sensitivity, leaving the conditions of the people and of the local communities unimproved.

46. Some encouraging signs can be found in the untapped potential of women in the countries of the subregion, the resilience and even the expansion of civil society in many countries and the enactment of groundbreaking legislation such as the "oil law" in Chad, which commits the Government to using its oil revenues for poverty reduction. The law stipulates that 10 per cent of royalties and dividends will be set aside for future generations, 80 per cent will be devoted to health, education, social services, rural development and public infrastructure, while 5 per cent will be invested back in the oil-producing region. It should be noted that within the framework of the law an oversight committee including representatives of civil society, Parliament, the Supreme Court and the Government has been created. This law, representing a kind of self-binding initiative, is almost unique.

E. HIV/AIDS

47. Central Africa is severely affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the majority of countries in the subregion being confronted with a prevalence rate of over 5 per cent among the sexually active population. In 2001, the prevalence rate ranged from 5.5 per cent in Angola to 14.8 per cent in the Central African Republic. The rate increased from 0.5 per cent in 1987 to 11.8 per cent in 2000 in Cameroon and from 1 per cent in 1986 to 7.7 per cent in 2001 in Gabon.



Source: Country reports, 2002.

48. The number of people affected by HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa as a whole is estimated at more than 4 million of the area's total population of around 640 million inhabitants. The pandemic is increasingly striking young people.

49. The infection rate is even more serious among the security forces and urban dwellers in the subregion, ranging from 8 per cent to 20 per cent among security personnel and from 20 per cent to 50 per cent among prostitutes in the major cities. The full extent of the pandemic is still not known in areas ravaged by armed conflicts.

50. The high mortality rate associated with AIDS deprives families of their loved ones and support, and further impoverishes those who are already poor. This negative impact is also responsible for absenteeism and the reduction in productivity observed in the workplace, resulting in declines in savings, increased social expenditures and dwindling investment capacities. The combined effect of the pandemic has resulted in drastically curtailed development efforts in ECCAS countries.

51. Moreover, hospital structures are overburdened with the care and treatment of patients. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, patients suffering from AIDS-related diseases occupy 50 per cent of hospital beds. In all the countries concerned, families and communities lack the necessary resources to care and cater for those infected.

52. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, in the 1980s about 319,000 people are estimated to have died of AIDS in ECCAS countries, which have also seen a sharp drop in life expectancy. In Angola and Cameroon, for example, it is estimated that life expectancy has been reduced by about 5 years and 10 years, respectively, largely because of HIV/AIDS.

53. Early mortality caused by HIV/AIDS has produced more than 2 million AIDS orphans in Central Africa, nearly half of them (930,000) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and 210,000 in Cameroon. In Rwanda, the 240,000 AIDS orphans have added to the thousands of other children orphaned by the conflicts that have ravaged the country during the past decade.

54. As everywhere else in Africa, countries in Central Africa started to put in place, as early as 1987-1988, national HIV/AIDS control programmes, with the support of the World Health Organization. As from 1996, with the support of UNAIDS, African countries started to develop strategic plans which facilitated the intensification of partnerships between the different actors involved in AIDS control. Despite those efforts, however, the epidemic is still spreading, owing to inadequate responses related to a poor level of national coordination and timid political commitment, late implementation of a multisectoral and decentralized response with greater involvement of the civil society, and extensive delays in the application of sound strategies of access to voluntary testing and treatment. It is to be noted that Central African countries are still not benefiting fully from opportunities to mobilize additional resources: for instance, only 4 of the 11 ECCAS countries are benefiting from the World Bank's AIDS assistance programmes, while only 3 countries have so far gained access to resources from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. It is also noted that the implementation of the Abuja Declaration of April 2001, in which African leaders pledged to devote 15 per cent of their national budgets to health and AIDS control, is not yet fully effective.

F. Subregional institutions

55. ECCAS, which has its headquarters in Libreville, was established in 1983, initially with the goals of promoting economic development and integration and fostering a common market among member States. Recognizing that economic progress could not be achieved in a climate of conflict and crisis, the goals were later expanded to include efforts to promote peace and security. The mission noted that the mechanisms set up by ECCAS to promote economic integration and sustainable peace and security in the subregion had not yet become fully operational. They include the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa, the Early-Warning Mechanism for Central Africa and the Central African Multinational Force. In addition, the fact that CEMAC is increasingly active in the areas of peace and security, as shown by its deployment of a regional peace force in the Central African Republic, a task which essentially falls outside its mandate, is further evidence of the vacuum that exists as a result of the inability of ECCAS to discharge fully its responsibilities in this field. Following the mission's visit to the subregion, the protocol on the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa came into force after its recent ratification by two additional member States, bringing the total number of full parties to 8 of the 11 member States.

G. United Nations presence in the subregion

56. The United Nations currently operates two mechanisms that deal with issues relating to peace and security in the Central African subregion. One of these is the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, based in Yaoundé, which was established in June 2002, at the request of the Governments of the subregion, to help to build national capacities in the areas of human rights and democracy by providing support to Governments, national institutions and non-governmental organizations. The second mechanism is the Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, established in 1992 to promote arms limitation, disarmament and confidence-building measures among States members of ECCAS. Since its creation, the Committee has served as the main forum at which ECCAS member States meet on a regular basis to discuss the challenges relating to peace and security in their subregion. The Department for Disarmament Affairs currently serves as the secretariat of the Committee. Several United Nations programmes and agencies, such as the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), have established subregional offices to deal with cross-cutting issues and implement regional projects.

H. Regional integration

57. Despite its great potential, the process of subregional integration has made only modest progress so far in Central Africa. The fact that Central African countries belong to different economic and political subregional entities, that they lack viable communication infrastructure, and that they have not fully implemented agreements on the free circulation of people and goods, has not facilitated integration. Most of the mission's interlocutors stressed the importance of such integration and called for the implementation of "integrating projects" to promote transnational economic infrastructure, telecommunications, transport, water and energy. Progress is gradually being made in the area of the free movement of

peoples, the leaders of CEMAC having decided to establish a CEMAC passport for their citizens. It should be noted that the ECA subregional development centres for Central and Eastern Africa, based respectively in Yaoundé and Kigali, have both developed integrating projects on water, energy, transport and communications.

V. Observations

58. The attempted coup d'état in July 2003 in relatively stable Sao Tome and Principe, barely a month after the mission's visit, demonstrates vividly the continuing volatility of the Central African subregion. The quick restoration of constitutional rule in that country, through the joint efforts of regional leaders and leaders of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, is a testimony to the potential role of regional organizations and to the growing determination of African leaders to promote democratic governance and the rule of law. At the same time, that event demonstrates that, while the restoration and consolidation of lasting peace in Central Africa remains the primary responsibility of the Governments and peoples of the subregion, the international community should continue to be supportive, for peace to be sustainable.

59. Issues of peace and security lie at the core of the challenges that confront the subregion. While United Nations offices and missions in Burundi, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are focused on country specific problems of peace consolidation and peacekeeping, there is an urgent need for the United Nations to help to implement subregional policies to support efforts to address cross-cutting challenges, including the promotion of good governance, and to stem the illegal flow of arms, drugs and militia.

60. As a result of the close linkage between poverty and conflict, it is essential for the United Nations and its agencies to develop a holistic and integrated approach to the problems of Central Africa in order to address conflicts at their core and to enhance the ability of the national, subregional and international actors to be more proactive in identifying and preventing future threats.

61. Subregional approaches are also required for effective security sector reform to mitigate the illegal flow of arms and armed elements from one country to another in the subregion. United Nations agencies operating in Central Africa should continue to enhance their efforts in support of the country-specific disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes in the subregion, especially in countries that are not covered by the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Programme.

62. Cross-border challenges, such as population movements, drugs and small arms trafficking, as well as the transnational movements of mercenaries and militias should be addressed more vigorously and proactively, with the support of the United Nations. Joint programmes in border areas, such as health, education and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, would be one way of combating such phenomena. Those issues should also be integrated into a more systematic planning of "exit strategies" for United Nations peace operations. To that end, for instance, the United Nations should report more frequently and systematically on the patterns of arms flows into the region, and especially on the activities of producer countries and arms merchants.

63. The liberalization of cross-border trade, especially in agricultural products, would help to improve market access and promote relationships between the local populations living in border areas.

64. A United Nations system-wide integrated approach in partnership with other humanitarian and development actors should be implemented to deal with the interrelated challenges of repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction in the Central African subregion.

65. Poor governance practices, such as the lack of accountability and transparency, impunity, exclusion, socio-economic marginalization, absence of the rule of law and respect for human rights have often triggered or exacerbated conflicts. Policies to promote respect for human rights, the rule of law and the development of inclusive and responsive governance would facilitate the establishment and consolidation of peace and stability in the subregion.

66. There is a need to strengthen institutional capacities of governance at the national, subregional and regional levels to enhance conflict prevention through the promotion of good governance practices. In this regard, the capacity of civil society to play a key role in democratization and peace-building should be strengthened.

67. It would also be important to strengthen the justice systems in the countries of the subregion to ensure predictability and reliability in the discharge of justice; these are essential attributes of good democratic practices and good governance and for the promotion of human rights.

68. In setting human rights policies, the following elements should be taken into account:

- National human rights protection systems should be strengthened by enhancing national institutional capacity. A subregional judicial training centre could be established as a concrete contribution to this goal. Allowing lawyers from the subregion and beyond to assist anyone requiring help before national judiciaries is also important and may be facilitated by the United Nations system.
- Human rights education, the promotion of a culture of peace and tolerance and reconciliation should be facilitated and promoted in the subregion.
- To fight against impunity and promote reconciliation, a mechanism should be established to address the fate of victims of numerous conflicts in the countries of the subregion, including by providing compensation and rehabilitation. Special attention should be paid to women and children.

69. The HIV/AIDS pandemic poses a serious and potentially explosive threat to the subregion, including for subregional peace, security and development. Efforts to promote greater awareness of this danger and to prevent and fight HIV/AIDS should be intensified and coordinated at the subregional level, especially given the porosity of borders and the increasing cross-border movements of people. The United Nations should cooperate with ECCAS to ensure effective subregional leadership and coordination of such efforts.

70. Central African subregional institutions, including ECCAS, CEMAC and the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries, should integrate the problem of HIV/AIDS into the agenda of peace, security, and political, economic and social issues that they deal with. The Organisation de coordination pour la lutte contre les endémies en Afrique centrale should ensure the coordination of the subregional

monitoring of health issues, in order to establish a regional HIV/AIDS strategy and to develop a United Nations assistance programme; to intensify the integration of HIV/AIDS issues into the concept of operations of the peacekeeping missions in Burundi, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo; to integrate HIV/AIDS into the demobilization, disarmament, reintegration and rehabilitation programmes in Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo; to enhance the presence of UNAIDS in Central Africa and to address HIV/AIDS at the International Conference on the Great Lakes region.

71. I wish to express my deep gratitude to the Governments of the subregion, the secretariat of the Economic Community of Central African States, the United Nations country teams and members of civil society, including the business community and trade union organizations, for the effective support and cooperation they extended to the multidisciplinary mission in each of the countries visited.

Annex

List of participants

The mission was led by the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Tuliameni Kalomoh.

Department of Political Affairs

Margaret Vogt, Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary-General

Angèle N. Makombo-Eboum, Political Affairs Officer

Jean-Francis Joh Epoko, Political Affairs Officer

Suzanne Biloa, Personal Assistant to the Assistant Secretary-General

Department of Peacekeeping Operations

Gérard Gerold, Senior Political Affairs Officer, MONUC

Department for Disarmament Affairs

Ivor Fung, Director, Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, Lomé

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Pierre Gelas, Regional Disaster Response Adviser, Regional Support Office for Central and East Africa

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Bacre Ndiaye, Director, New York Office

Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator

Innocent Gabriel Dassanou, Security Coordinator in Cameroon

United Nations Development Programme

Babacar Cissé, Senior Country Programme Adviser (Central and Eastern Africa)

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Wairimu Karago, Regional Coordinator for operations in the Great Lakes region

Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

Pierre M'Pele, Team Leader for West and Central Africa

United Nations Human Settlements Programme

Joseph Guiebo, Senior Human Settlements Officer, Regional Office for Africa and Arab States